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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this report is to study the transition from school to surplus property and the consequences for the immediate neighborhood. From the 53 schools closed in New York City since 1975, six schools were selected for study. Of the six schools, three are vacant, two are used by private organizations, and one by the board of education. Data on indicators of neighborhood change in each of the six communities were collected from city and local sources. In those cases where alternate uses were developed for empty school buildings, the neighborhood retained its character and its style; where buildings were vacant, crime and decay appeared to spread, and the fabric of the neighborhood was torn. The following problems in finding alternate uses for closed schools are identified: lack of coordination among agencies at the city and community level; ineffective strategies for protecting school buildings prior to reuse; and absence of strategic and long-term planning for marketing surplus schools. These problems are discussed and recommendations made for their solutions. (Author/MLF)

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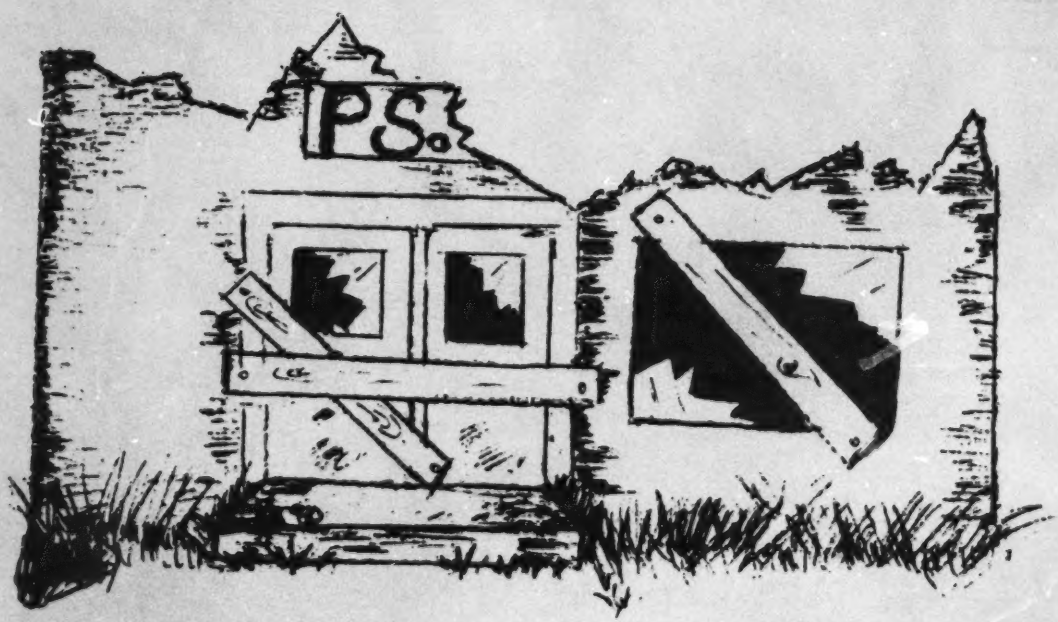

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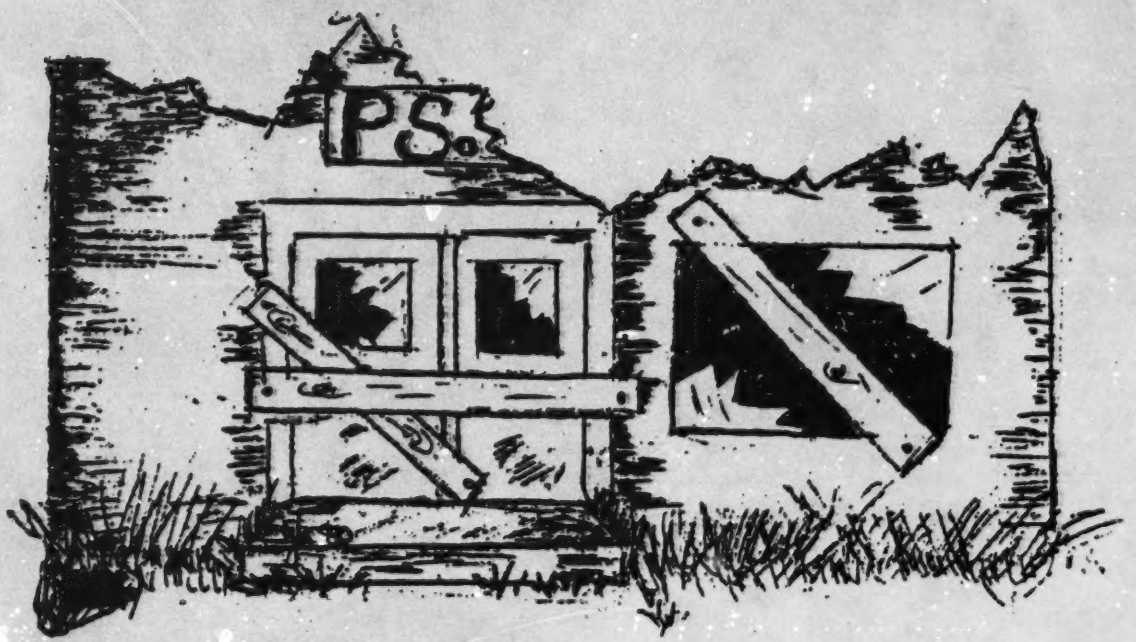

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When a School is Closed

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FOREWORD

"The City closed the school and walked away." That's what Father Gillespie of Our Lady of Solace Church in Coney Island says about the abandoned hulk of a school that dominates his neighborhood. And he should know. The vestments stolen from his church were found on the roof of P.S. 80. Many of the children coming to his parochial school are former public school students whose parents are afraid to send their children on the buses or walking past the boarded up buildings to go to the public school in the other end of the district. To get to our Lady of Solace they must walk in the middle of the gutter because the sidewalks where shopkeepers used to sweep are covered with garbage or encrusted with ice.

More than the children have been affected. Neighbors are afraid the constant fires in the school will spread to their homes. Lou Powsner, a columnist for the community newspaper, the Brooklyn Graphic reports, "They shoot and sell dope inside. The gangs use it to stash, and to shack up." Summer squatters hook into the city's overhead electricity. A bodega, pizza parlor, two luncheonettes, a stationery store and an ice cream parlor are gone.

The irony of P.S. 80 is that such devastation was avoidable. The building stood vacant for two years before it was sealed. By the time a neighborhood association expressed interest in using the space, it was too badly damaged to renovate.

The story of P.S. 80 is not the inevitable result of the decision to close schools. Good planning and coordinated efforts by the city, the Board of Education and the community can break the link between

closed schools and neighborhood decay. However, while the impending plan to close 40 schools is still under consideration, the lesson of P.S. 80 must not be lost. The Educational Priorities Panel has issued this report in the hopes of encouraging us to learn from past experiences such as P.S. 80 and to change the procedures that led to such a debacle.

-- Helen C. Heller
Coordinator

SUMMARY

The Mayor's budget proposes the closing of forty public schools with the next six months. If the City Planning Commission's recommendations are implemented, one in every five schools in the City will be closed by the end of the decade. What happens to a community when a school is closed?

The purpose of this report is to study the transition from school to surplus property and the consequences for the immediate neighborhood. It is not to evaluate whether school closings is beneficial or detrimental to educational quality. We looked at six of the fifty-three schools which were closed in New York City between 1975 and 1980. Three buildings have been used continuously since the school was closed; three are vacant, vandalized and burned. The contrast between neighborhoods where schools are used and where they remain vacant is dramatic. The neighborhoods surrounding the three vacant buildings have decayed and crime has increased. In comparison, around the three buildings which are used, neighborhoods appear to be stable, and community leaders agree that the new use of the building is an asset.

While the Mayor and the Chancellor state that no school buildings will be closed until an alternate use has been developed for the building, our case studies demonstrate that this goal cannot be achieved without careful planning and changes in the current disposition process, and certainly not within six months that the Mayor has allotted.

Our findings reveal three major problems in developing alternative uses for surplus schools:

• Lack of coordination among agencies inhibits and delays disposing of surplus schools because of conflicting city agency goals, poor communication among Community Planning Boards and school boards and between the City, the Board of Education and those boards, and the absence of centralized information on possible uses, funding sources, and constraints.

• Strategies for protecting empty schools prior to reuse are ineffective because of unclear responsibility for securing buildings, poor short-term security measures, and inadequate funding to guard and seal empty buildings.

• There is an absence of strategic and long-term planning for "marketing" surplus schools and school space.

Because no single agency is responsible for planning and managing the disposition of surplus school buildings, the lag between closing a school and developing reuse ranges from months to years. As time passes, buildings deteriorate and their marketability decreases. Costs to the city rise. Expenditures increase, both directly for securing vacant buildings, and indirectly for police and fire services as well as the loss of potential tax revenues from the neighborhood.

To resolve these problems, the Educational Priorities Panel makes the following recommendations:

• The Division of Real Property (DRP) within the Department of General Services should be given a clear mandate to assume responsibilitiy for marketing surplus school buildings.

• Increased coordination between Community Planning Boards and Community School Boards to plan for use of vacant schools should be

developed through assignment of community school board members to Community Planning Board Youth planning, education, and land use committees.

• DRP should require six months to a year notice before a building is vacated to allow for planning for reuse.

• DRP's role as real estate manager should be expanded to include broader technical assistance to clients that demonstrate ability to provide successful reuse.

• DRP should develop handbooks explaining Uniform Land Use Review Procedures (ULURP), regulations and requirements and possible funding sources. These books should be available in English and Spanish.

• The Board of Education should transfer buildings to DRP as soon as they are vacant. It should remove all supplies and equipment when the building is vacated. The building should be "broom clean."

• Adequate funding for guard service and sealup for empty school buildings should be provided tc DRP. Additional funding should be supplied from Community Development monies and the capital budget.

• Buildings declared unsafe should be demolished.

• DRP should develop criteria for reuse based on costs to the City as well as appropriate use of the building within the community. Among such criteria should be evaluation of one-time revenues, annual revenue from rental, impact on the community and viability of the client.

• Existing constraints inhibiting reuse such as zoning restrictions and legislation prohibiting rental to profit-making organizations should be examined and amended where necessary.

• The disposition process for vacant public buildings should be tightened and strengthened by establishing these suggested criteria enforcing timetables, and developing specific strategies for reuse.

Only after these recommendations are implemented can the pursuit of alternate uses and their timely occupation of school buildings proceed. And only then can we hope to break the link between closed schools and neighborhood decay.

WHEN A SCHOOL IS CLOSED...

Chapter I: Introduction

The Budget Context

When Mayor Koch announced his two year fiscal plan for New York City in January, 1980, there was an outcry from the educational community. Included among his proposed cutbacks was a proposal to close forty schools by September, 1980. The "hit" list prepared by the City Budget Office included schools in 21 of the City's 32 districts. Members of Community School Boards throughout the city expressed outrage and dismay in anticipation of the effect on their neighborhoods. Commenting on the proposal, the Superintendent of District 7 in the Bronx said, "...once the school goes, the community seems to go." A member of a Manhattan School Board echoed the superintentdent's sentiments, "We are looking at schools, at what happens to a community when a school closes..." (New York Times, "Budget Planners Announce School Closings", January 11, 1980).

What does happen to a community when a school closes? This is a question which school districts throughout the country, including those less financially strapped than New York City's, have been forced to confront. Do families move away because there are no neighborhood schools, leaving behind empty housing? Do small shops which depend on business from the school close their doors? Does the vacant school building attract vandalism and arson? If closing a school produces such consequences, what can be done to forestall them, other than to maintain half empty schools at great expense?

Since 1975, 53 schools in New York City have been closed. If the Mayor's proposal to close 40 additional schools succeeds, a total of 93, or almost 10% of the City's 980 school buildings will have been closed by 1981. Moreover, if the City Planning Commission's recommendations are implemented, 200 schools will be closed during the next ten years. (Capital Needs and Priorities, 1979, City Planning Commission, p. 48)

The current proposals to close schools attempt to address two significant problems which the City is facing: enrollment decline and the need to reduce expenditures while maintaining services. However, there is considerable disagreement about the nature and extent of both problems, that is, the degree of enrollment decline and the possible savings which can be achieved by closing schools.

It is evident that school enrollment in New York City is declining. From 1970 to 1977, enrollment in elementary and intermediate schools decreased by 16.4% from 847,600 to 708,900. But it is difficult to accurately project the degree and distribution of such decline. In 1979, for example, the City Planning Commission estimated that the system would lose 124,400 pupils by 1982 and an additional 538,000 pupils by 1990. These projections were based on anticipated birth rates for 1977. Actual births in 1977 were fewer than the Commission had predicted, compelling it to revise its estimates.

The Board of Education has experienced similar difficulties. In 1979, the Board's estimates fell 5,500 short of actual enrollments. The reason for the error is not clearly understood. Some observers believe that the enrollment increase is the result of a growing number of undocumented aliens in the schools, while others credit the rise to changing population movement and to influx of new immigrants. In either

event it is evident that existing methods for predicting enrollments are inadequate.

Similarly, building a budget on projected savings that will result from school closings is risky. Potential savings from closing schools are estimated variously at $7.2 million in 1981 for closing 40 schools to $231 million for closing 200 schools by 1990 ("The City of New York Financial Plan, Fiscal Years 1980-1984", Capital Needs and Priorities, ibid.). The estimates for possible expenditure reductions are based on a variety of calculations. Some reflect the savings accrued by elimination of positions, maintenance and operating costs; others include the additional costs of providing temporary security for the buildings until other uses are found.

Another uncertainty is the amount of time it takes to close a school building. Closing 40 schools in the proposed time frame of six months represents a formidable, almost impossible, task under current conditions. The process involves actors and agencies at both the community and city-wide level: community school boards, superintendents and principals, the Chancellor's office, the Board of Education's Bureau of Educational Facilities Planning and the Building Review Committee. Each group has different responsibilities and plays different roles in selecting which schools should be closed, as well as where students and staff will be transferred.

According to its own reports, the Board of Education recently has closed, is in the final steps of closing, or has found another use for 18 buildings, but it is difficult to determine exactly how long the process took from beginning to end. It is evident, however, that in no case was it less than a year for buildings in use as schools at the time. Others were leased space or were already empty. At any rate, it

does not seem possible to close double that number of schools in the next six months. And, as our case studies will demonstrate, if the attempt is made without adequate planning, the effects on neighborhoods will be devastating.

Opinions also differ on the educational benefits or detriments of closing schools. Many parents maintain the quality of education is enhanced by the proximity of the school to the child's home and community. Further, they say that the process of changing schools is disruptive, possibly traumatic, for children. Others urge that consolidating schools can provide definite advantages through economies of scale, such as heat and maintenance efficiencies, less administrative duplication, greater variety of services, better facilities and more support services.

Despite disagreement over the degree of enrollment decline, the number of schools which should or can be closed, or the savings which can be anticipated from closing schools, the fact remains that decreasing school enrollment in New York City has resulted in a large number of schools which are underutilized. New York City cannot afford to maintain, repair and staff schools which are not used to capacity.

Purpose

The transition from school to surplus property and the consequences for the immediate neighborhood is the focus of this study. We do not attempt to evaluate whether or not school closings is a desirable policy in terms of its educational impact. In looking at schools that had been closed, we concentrated on their neighborhoods; we did not visit the schools to which the children had been transferred. Our initial objective was to analyze the economic and social impact on the neighborhood of closing

a school. However, two factors compelled us to shift our focus: the first, preliminary analysis of existing data on the 53 closed schools; the second, visits to the 53 buildings.

As the accompanying table and map indicate (pages 42-44), schools have been closed in every borough in the City. Two-thirds of the closed schools are located in Manhattan and Brooklyn, and almost a quarter in the Bronx. Harlem, the Lower East Side, Ocean-Hill Brownsville, and the South Bronx have borne the brunt of school closings. Only 7 districts in all were spared.

It appeared that it would be difficult to isolate the economic and social impact of school closings in these neighborhoods, where the process of decline might have begun before the school was closed. A large number of schools were located in transitional neighborhoods where the population was declining and housing stock deteriorating. Moreover, school profile data from the Bureau of Educational Statistics indicated that many closed schools were in poverty neighborhoods. Many schools had been eligible for Title I funding and, in a large number of cases, over 50% of the student body was eligible for free lunches.

Site visits confirmed this assumption. Many schools, severely vandalized and burned, seemed to be a center from which vacant housing and shuttered stores radiated. However, it would have been difficult to prove that the neighborhood had deteriorated because one building, admittedly a focal point, had been closed. Moreover, although studies have suggested that there is a strong association between deterioration of local property and deterioration of large public buildings, establishing such a causal relationship in cases where schools had been closed for five years would have represented irresponsible research (Educational

Facilities Laboratories, a division of the Academy for Educational Development, "Surplus School Space in New York City: The Problems; the Opportunity," January, 1980).

But the site visits provided us with the new focus of this study. In those neighborhoods where vacant schools had been rented or sold to other organizations, decline appeared to have been arrested. Where school buildings were vacant, decay was apparent. What appeared to be significant, in terms of impact on the neighborhood, therefore, was not the closing of the school, but the use of the building.

Thus, we set out to explore three principal issues related to the impact of school closings on neighborhoods:

- the physical, socio-economic, and psychological impact on neighborhoods and their residents of vacant schools compared those for which an alternate use has been developed;
- problems in the process of closing schools;
- problems of developing alternate uses for vacant school buildings.

Methodology

From the 53 schools closed since 1975, we selected six schools which represented geographical and socio-economic diversity as well as varied uses and neighborhood impact. Two schools were located in Manhattan, two in Brooklyn, one in the Bronx, and one in Queens. Of the six schools, three are vacant, two are used by private organizations, and one by the Board of Education. Data on indicators of neighborhood change in each of the six communities were collected from city and local sources. These included housing data from the Management Information System for Land Use (MISLAND file) maintained by the Department of City Planning, crime data from the Police Department records and interviews, and fire data from records

and interviews. In addition, data on the transition from school to surplus property was collected from records of the Division of Real Property in the Department of General Services, statistics from the Board of Education and Community School District records.

To supplement these data sources, interviews were conducted with key participants in both community and city agencies. At the community level, interviews were conducted with Community School Board members, Community Planning Board members, District Managers, Superintendents and community residents. Key individuals interviewed at the city level included policy-makers at the Division of Real Property, the Board of Education, and the Office of Management and Budget. This research resulted in the profiles of our six schools.

Chapter II: School Profiles

The six schools selected for analysis here include P.S. 186, Manhattan; P.S. 107, Manahttan; P.S. 37, Bronx; P.S. 122, Brooklyn; P.S. 80, Brooklyn; and P.S. 179, Queens. With the exception of P.S. 179, each of the schools was more than 60 years old, coal heated and operating at less than 75% of capacity. Two schools - 186 and 122 - were closed because replacement schools had been built; the remainder were closed because of declining enrollments and increasing costs. In three cases - 107, 37 and 179 - there was strong community opposition to closing the school: parents fought the school closing with demonstrations and protests.

Three of the buildings - 107, 122 and 179 - have been used continuously since the school was closed: one has been rented by a community group, one by a private school, the third by the Board of Education. Three buildings - 37, 80 and 186 - are vacant, vandalized, stripped and burned, despite attempts to seal them.

The contrast between the neighborhoods where schools are used and where they remain vacant is dramatic. The neighborhoods surrounding 37, 80 and 186 have deteriorated: the number of vacant and unoccupied buildings has increased and police report a greater incidence of crime. Community leaders blame decline in the neighborhood on the vacant buildings. In comparison, the neighborhoods adjacent to 107, 122 and 179 appear to have remained stable, or improved, and community leaders feel that the new use of the buildings is an asset.

Our case studies reveal several problems common to the school closing process before 1977. Lack of coordination between city agencies - specifically the Department of Real Property (DRP) within the Department of General Services (DGS) and the Board of Education - contributed significantly to decay of vacant buildings. Confusion over responsibility for protecting or sealing buildings created a delay in the completion of these tasks. The longer the delay continued, the less marketable the buildings became as they fell victim to repeated vandalism and arson fire. Groups which had initially shown interest in use of the buildings became discouraged as potential costs for renovation and rehabilitation increased. The vandalized hulks had a damaging impact on the neighborhood - emotionally, socially and physically.

Our studies also indicate that buildings which were rented, leased or used by the City seemed to contribute to the stability of the neighborhood. It is important to note, however, that alternate use in these cases was not the result of successful marketing or planning by the City, but rather aggressive action by the community group or private organization. In the past, the City played a passive, reactive role in developing reuse, and, other than performing routine bureaucratic tasks, did not positively contribute to the process. Since 1977, the process has changed, but, unfortunately, the underlying problems of closing schools and planning for reuse remain unsolved.

P.S. 186, Manhattan

P.S. 186, built in 1902, is located on 145th Street in Community School District #6 in the Hamilton Heights area of Manhattan. A Title I eligible school, it was operating at 73% of capacity when it was closed in June, 1975. The school, heated by coal, had annual operating costs of

$159,590.

As with many turn-of-the-century buildings, P.S. 186 had steep, poorly lit staircases, some halls ending in cul de sacs, and no equipment to cook hot lunches. Lunches prepared by the Bureau of School Lunches were heated at the school for the children.

The decision to close P.S. 186 was made in January, 1973 when the Community School Board adopted a resolution surrendering the building upon completion of P.S. 153 on 146th Street. Thus, when the building was formally surrendered by the Board of Education to the Board of Estimate in June, 1975, there was little opposition in the community. The pupils were transferred to the new school in September, and the keys to P.S. 186 passed to the Division of Real Property (DRP), then the Department of Real Estate at the end of the month.

The records are silent on the status of P.S. 186 until April, 1976 when the Division of Real Property established a minimum sale price of $80,000 for the building.

During the seven month period between closing and DRP's valuation of the building, one member of the community notes, a security guard was assigned to protect the building. Nevertheless, the building deteriorated. Pipes were stolen from the bathrooms, fires were started, and the building, which has since received Landmarks Conservancy status, began to decay.

Community hopes for use of the building were strong despite the apparent decline of the structure. The Community School Board, hoping to use the land for I.S. 232, requested the Board of Education to retain the site. Area 145, Inc., a not-for-profit organization sponsored by the Convent Avenue Baptist Church, began to develop a proposal to use P.S. 186 as a community center. In preparation for more permanent occu-

pancy it obtained a $1/month, month-to-month lease from DRP in August, 1976.

During the following year and a half, according to central records at the Department of General Services, control over P.S. 186 was the subject of controversy between the DRP and the Board of Education. In late January, 1978, despite Board of Education protests that the Community Board wanted the site, the Board of Estimate adopted a resolution to lease the building. That March, DRP formally accepted the surrender of the land and the building. Within three weeks, the Board of Education protested again, arguing that the Community School Board had released the building, not the site. In April, DRP informed the Board of Education that surrendering a building without a site conflicted with agency policy. The file closes there.

The records do not state that the building was ever sealed, although they include a request for sealing from Area 145. Nevertheless, a member of the School Board noted that the building's tinseal was broken in the fall of 1979. Community leaders interviewed said that building had been vandalized and is often used by drug abusers.

According to precinct officers, the area surrounding P.S. 186 is a high crime area. However, existing activities and the fact that 145th Street is a major subway and bus stop may contribute strongly to the crime problem. Moreover, available data indicates that the number of vacant buildings near the school increased after the school was closed.

Despite the condition of the building, Area 145 and the Community School Board have hopes for 186. Area 145 would still like to use the building as a community center and has sought Community Development (CD) funding. The School Board is investigating funding for a multi-service

center combining a mini-middle school and a senior citizens center.

Community members agree that P.S. 186, vacant and vandalized, has had a damaging effect on the quality of life in the neighborhood. According to them, the building has attracted crime and arson; it has contributed to the "creeping devastation" on 146th Street between Broadway and Amsterdam. As one member of the community noted," the building is a symbol of abandonment and creates depression in the neighborhood."

Because it is a hazard, both the Community School Board and the Community Planning Board have requested that P.S. 186 be sealed. Permanent sealing is scheduled for May, 1980.

P.S. 107, Manhattan

Located at 105th and Lexington Avenue, P.S. 107 in Community School District 7 was 94 years old when it was closed in June, 1975. The year before it closed, P.S. 107 had 591 stduents on the register, 69.7% of the stated capacity of the school. The school was eligible for Title I funding; 86% of the pupils were eligible for free lunch. The school shared a coal-fired boiler with an adjacent school, P.S. 172, and had been scheduled for painting. As with P.S. 186, the building did not have adequate facilities to prepare hot lunches for the children. Annual operating costs were approximately $45,413.

P.S. 107 was a victim of declining enrollments and increasing costs. In response to the Board of Education's request to close a school in the District, the CSB selected P.S. 107 because of its age and its antiquated heating system.

The community reacted strongly. According to the school board member, parents protested loudly at the School Board's hearing. There were

demonstrations outside the school building. The Superintendent reports that everyone opposed the Community School Board's decision. Despite the Board's attempts to assuage the community with documentation of cost savings and assurances that teachers would be moved with the children, the community remained antagonistic.

The climate was not improved when it become apparent that Massive Economic Neighborhood Development (MEND) planned to rent the building. There were accusations that the decision to close 107 was politically motivated by pressure from MEND.

MEND moved into the building a week after the Board of Education surrendered the keys to the Board of Estimate on June, 1975. This efficient turnover merited a letter of praise from the Chancellor's office. Bernard Gifford, the Deputy Chancellor, formally thanked the Commissioner of DRP for relieving the Board of Education of the responsibility of maintaining 107 and noted that the transfer saved the Board $20,000 annually in custodial costs.

There was a strong contrast between the community's opposition to closing P.S. 107 as a school and its response to MEND's occupancy of the building. Community members acknowledge that 107 did not deteriorate because MEND moved into the building as quickly as it did.

Many community leaders interviewed feel that the rental of P.S. 107 stabilized the neighborhood. This is confirmed by housing data which indicated that the number of vacant buildings increased until the school was closed in 1975 and then decreased. Furthermore, the number of buildings in tax arrears increased 11% between 1974 and 1978, 2% less than that for Manhattan as a whole. Police officers report the incidence of crime near

107 is moderate compared with the remainder of the precinct. This can be attributed in part to the presence of a community center in the school, and the adequate lighting provided by a nearby housing development.

The positive features of reuse are particularly apparent to community members who have watched P.S. 168, a neighborhood school on 105th Street, decay. According to the superintendent, P.S. 168 "went" once there was no longer anyone on the premises. Within two weeks, the plumbing had been stolen, fires were set, and the building became a shell. Police reports corroborate this perception. In comparison to the blocks around P.S. 107 which remained relatively stable, the P.S. 168 block on 105th Street attracted crime and began to affect the residential buildings on 104th Street.

P.S. 107 represents a good example of how immediate reuse of a school can benefit a neighborhood. It also demonstrates how a determined community group used the political and bureaucratic process to its advantage. Members of the community noted that MEND had contacted its Councilman, Borough President and Congressmen to put a "hold" on the building as soon as the Community School Board voted to close 107. Thus, in November, 1976 when DRP appraised the building in preparation for sale of the property, it noted that the building was occupied by MEND on a temporary basis. Although the building was formally surrendered to the Board of Estimate in March, 1977, MEND continued to rent it until September, 1977, 15 months after its initial occupancy. At that time, DRP informed MEND that 107 would be processed for long-term lease, restricted to community services, and would be subject to ULURP. Today, the building is occupied by the East Harlem Community Improvement Association, MEND's successor.

P.S. 122, Brooklyn

P.S. 122 at 215 Heyward Street, Brooklyn, is a red, fireproof building erected in 1900. By 1975, enrollment at the pre-kindergarten to 4th grade school was only 631. The 1975 annual operating cost was $84,667.

When the school was vacated in June, 1975, the pupils were transferred to a section of I.S. 71, a new school located several hundred yards away. Because the student body was transferred intact to the new building, there was little opposition from the community. (During the summer it was vacant, P.S. 122 suffered only minor vandalism.)

The United Talmudical Academy, "Torah V'Yerah" of Brooklyn, signed a month-to-month lease in Oct. 1975 and moved in a month later. At public auction, on June 2, 1976, United Talmudical Academy successfully bid for a long-term lease at $4,000 per year.

Representatives of the School Board, Community Board and the Yeshiva are satisfied with the new tenants. The Community School District Superintendent recounts that the building was to be closed as a fire hazard and had problems with the boiler as well, which was replaced by the Yeshiva. Closing the building that housed P.S. 122 is not viewed as a detriment to the community because the large Hasidic community needed a school. The transfer of the public school intact to a new building meant minimal disruption for the students and the neighborhood. (Community concern centers on P.S. 36, another closed school building in the area for which no use was found. P.S. 36 was left vacant, has been vandalized and attracted crime to the empty building.)

The overall trend in tax arrears for the area around P.S. 122 from 1974-1978 showed an increase of 6%. This was far lower than the borough-wide increase of 17%. Of the 6 areas studied, the area around P.S. 122

was the only one in which the number of reoccupied buildings exceeded or equalled the number of demolished buildings.

Crime, which consists largely of purse-snatching, is minor. A police officer indicated that the industrial development near the school also contributes to the low incidence of serious crime.

P.S. 80, Brooklyn

P.S. 80 stretches block-wide between W. 17th and W. 19th Street in the Coney Island section of Brooklyn. Built in 1905, with an addition in 1908, the school had a capacity of 1,166 pupils. In 1975, the Title I school was 54.5% utilized with a register of 627. During its last year of operation, the coal heated building cost the Board of Education $119,894. P.S. 80 was repainted and waterproofed two years before it was closed, and several rooms were retiled.

The District 21 Community School Board never voted to close the school and appealed the Chancellor's decision to close the building. When it lost its appeal, the district moved quickly. Within two weeks, it cleaned out supplies, school records dating back to 1905, brass doorknobs, brass plaques and other school property.

The P.S. 80 students were assigned to attend schools in the northern part of district 21. At that time, the district was involved in litigation (Jiminez v. CSD 21), charging segregation in the district elementary schools. Previously, Mark Twain J.H.S. had been made a magnet school for the gifted and talented in response to judicial findings of illegal segregation in the middle school. (Hart v. CSD 21)

In September, 1976, when schools reopened, the community demonstrated against the busing of P.S. 80 students to the northern end of the district.

This resulted in a rapid rezoning of the schools. Parents were given the opportunity to bus their children to the north or send their children to neighboring schools. The children who remained in Coney Island were zoned to P.S. 288 or P.S. 329. Of the 627 students registered at P.S. 80, 278 opted for Coney Island, 246 travelled north. The remaining 103 enrolled in either the nearby parochial school or moved.

The empty hulk of P.S. 80 has caused frustration and concern to the neighborhood. The building was vacant for two years before it was sealed. Sealing was not successful: cinder blocks were knocked out before the concrete dried.

Vandalism began quickly. Windows were broken, copper piping was stolen, fires were set. Two years after the closing, at the request of Astella Corp, a neighborhood improvement organization, architects from Pratt Institute evaluated the building's possible use as a multi-service center for the community. They determined that renovation and rehabilitation costs were far beyond the capacity of a neighborhood organization. Before any use could be developed, the structure needed major rebuilding.

Neighbors tell of summer squatters tapping into the overhead electric lines to provide light in the building for the fenci[illegible] operations, drug dealings and other activities. Fires have damaged the walls, ceiling and roof. Removal of plumbing let water flood the basement.

The closed school affected the immediate neighborhood in other ways. Commercial stores which depended on school children, their parents and school staff have gradually gone out of business. The closing of a stationery store, two luncheonettes and an ice cream parlor can be traced to the closing of the school.

The neighborhood is affected by these closed stores surrounding the

empty school. Without maintenance by storekeepers and custodians, garbage piles up, no sidewalk is swept. In winter, snow and ice build up on the sidewalks in front of the stores and around the school. The blight in the immediate area has combined with the vandalism and deterioration of the school.

Between 1974 and 1978, the 154% increase in the number of demolished buildings in the school area was much higher than that the 64% increase for the borough of Brooklyn. The trend in tax arrears however, was similar to the rest of the borough -- school area 15%, Brooklyn 17%.

The Division of Real Property put P.S. 80 on the auction block with a minimum sale price of $40,000 in August, 1977. The buyer subsequently defaulted. P.S. 80 is scheduled for permanent seal-up in May 1980.

Alice Paul, director of Astella Corp, says "Leaving a school vacant is not a neutral factor, but a negative one."

P.S. 37, The Bronx

P.S. 37, on East 145th Street in the Bronx was built in 1905 and modernized in 1958. It is located in CSD #7 where enrollment was halved between 1970 and 1980. In 1974-75 the school population was 780 students. By October 1975, enrollment had dropped to 551 children and the building was used at 48% of capacity. Operating costs for the coal-heated school were $123,525 in 1975.

The Community School Board closed P.S. 37 along with three other schools in the district. The CSB transferred pupils from P.S. 37 to P.S. 27 and planned to accommodate the combined population in a school slated for future costuction. When residents mobilized to protest the school closings, the School Board documented its decision on the basis of

cost savings and argued that a new school was planned. After the new school was eliminated from the capital budget, the community condemned the CSB members and called them traitors. The Board members felt that the City had betrayed them.

Two organizations, the South Bronx Community Corp and United Bronx Parents, were interested in P.S. 37. Before either organization could use the building, the Board of Education had to surrender it to DRP, who could lease it to a community group. Within a week of its January, 1976 closing, the building was vandalized. It was severely damaged within a month.

By July 1976, Dept. of Real Property files show:

"An inspection of the property revealed that all 15 entrances and hundreds of windows are broken. The steel doors have been ripped off the hinges and are scattered throughout the area. We have received requests from the Police and Fire Depts. requesting that we secure this building. I request that the bureau of maintenance inspect and make recommendations as to how we can comply with the request of these departments. Our normal securing procedure would just be a waste of money and accomplish nothing."

Six months later the record shows another memo requesting that the building be secured. A Community School Board member stated, "While the building is a school, the parents watch, the community cares. When the building is taken away, the people no longer care and the neighborhood no longer watches."

Community residents claim that arsonists' targets shifted from the vacant school to surrounding housing, making the area unliveable. Fire department reports indicate that while the building had been heavily vandalized, much damage was specifically caused by fire. Immediately following the school closing in January 1976, a series of fires were reported ranging from small

fires which took twenty minutes to extinguish to those taking well over an hour to put out. Sometimes several fires a day were reported. Causes include "suspicious origin," "unknown," "malicious mischief" and "incendiary." From 1974 to 1978 the 209% inrease in demolished buildings around P.S. 37 is a far greater increase than the 158% increase for the borough as a whole.

P.S. 37 was put up for auction twice. There were no bidders for the school at either auction. The building, vandalized and firegutted, is scheduled for demolition.

P.S. 179, Queens

P.S. 179, in Fresh Meadows, Queens, built in 1955 was the youngest among the six schools studied. The District 26 Community School Board had decided to close one of their underutilized schools prior to the fiscal crisis. P.S. 179 was selected. With a capacity of 459 in 1975 and a utilization rate of 69.5% it was symptomatic of a district with declining enrollment. The district register had fallen from 21,000 in 1969, to 12,000 by 1979.

Community residents fought to keep P.S. 179 open. Tenants feared the elementary school closing would encourage some families who lived in an adjacent garden complex to leave and prevent others with children from moving in. Both parents and teachers at 179 were pleased with the ungraded primary program. The excellence of this program prompted their suggestions for ways to keep the school open and still benefit the area. These included "pairing" of neighborhood schools in a K-3, 4-6 arrangement which would have also been economically sound because the building was still scheduled for use as a district office.

Nonetheless, the Community School Board voted to close the school. Some community residents feel that removing the elementary school from P.S 179 influenced some families to move that June.

The district office had occupied the first floor of P.S 179 with all but kindergarten classrooms on the second floor. The children were transferred to PS. 177 and P.S. 26, both of which had ample space. Lifeline School, for severely disturbed children, negotiated for space in 179. Residents were concerned that a private organization would have no obligation to open the school to the community and rejected the arrangement.

Instead, classes from overcrowded P.S. 19 in District 24 were bused in to 179 for two years. When these students were transferred to yet another school, the School for Language and Hearing Impaired Children (SLHIC) a special education program, moved into the unused second floor classrooms.

Rooms on the main floor were made available to community groups during the day, after-school and on those evenings the district office remained open. The community has greater access now than it did when P.S. 179 was used as a school. Five groups -- OPUS - Organization of People Undaunted by Stroke, the Community Planning Board, the Fresh Meadows Tenants Organization, the Scouts and the Mothers Club use the school.

With enrollments in the district continuing to decline, P.S. 179 will be closed effective June 1980. The district office will move to I.S. 74 and SLHIC to P.S. 41.

Under the provisions of the City Charter, Community Planning Boards do not become involved in closed schools until the Board of Education and the Community School Board surrender the building. However, to avoid leaving the building vacant, Community Planning Board # 8 began to review proposed

uses for 179 in March 1980, in the hopes of approving a tenant for July 1st occupancy. Four private schools, including Truro College, have applied to move into P.S. 179. The Community Board is trying to select a tenant that will not compete with the public schools for neighborhood students.

Conclusions

Our case studies indicate that closing a school does not of itself negatively affect a neighborhood. This is not to deny that the closing process can be a wrenching experience for a community. It can cause disruption, anxiety and a sense of loss.

In most cases, however, the decision to close a particular school is based on sound, logical reasoning. The majority of schools closed in the past were old and expensive to operate, with average annual operating costs of $114,000. Community School Boards, acting in the best interests of the community, attempted to make the transition as painless as possible: children were transferred to other schools within the neighborhood, sometimes only a few blocks away from their old schools.

Our case studies reveal that the disposition of the vacant building has a significant impact on the status of the neighborhood. In those cases where alternate uses were developed for empty school buildings, the neighborhood retained its character and its style; where buildings were vacant, crime and decay appeared to spread, and the fabric of the neighborhood was torn.

That developing alternate uses for each closed school is an important goal for the City has formally been acknowledged by both the Chancellor and the Mayor. In August 1979, the Chancellor stated that, to every possible extent, no school would be closed until an alternate use was available for the building. (The Chancellor's Office, Board of Education, "Recommendations

for School Consolidation", August 31, 1979). In March 1980, the Mayor made a similar commitment to the Educational Priorities Panel.

In light of our findings, these goals are laudable. However, as our findings also indicate, achieving them will be difficult. Some of the obstacles that must be overcome are inherent in the structure of New York City's government; others are endemic to a City bureaucracy as large and complex as New York's. Based on our case studies, we have identified the following problems in finding alternate uses for closed schools:

1) Lack of coordination among agencies at the city and community level;
2) Ineffective strategies for protecting school buildings prior to re-use;
3) Absence of strategic and long-term planning for marketing surplus schools.

The next three chapters will discuss these problems and make recommendations for their solutions.

Chapter III: Lack of Coordination Among City Agencies at the Board of Education, Community Planning Boards, and Community School Boards

The lack of coordination about agencies inhibits and delays disposing of surplus schools for three reasons:

a. There are conflicts among the missions and responsibilities of city agencies;

b. There is poor communication among Community Planning Boards and Community School Boards, City agencies and the Board of Education;

c. There is an absence of centralized information about school reuse.

a) Conflicting roles and missions of city agencies impede disposition of vacant schools.

Six agencies participate in the process of closing or developing alternate uses for schools. These include the City Planning Commission, the Department of City Planning, the Department of General Services. Housing, Preservation and Development Agency, the Office of Economic Development, and the Board of Education. Each of these agencies, and the divisions within their jurisdictions, has distinct missions, goals, and objectives. The lack of coordination among them results in confusion, delay and conflict over responsibility for maintaining and marketing surplus school buildings.

The City Planning Commission

The City Planning Commission is responsible for the City's physical development. The Commission evaluates the City's capital program annually. It also certifies all local land use applications and recommends appropriate land use to the Board of Estimate.

The Department of City Planning

The Department of City Planning serves as staff to the City Planning Commission. It advises the Mayor on planning matters, conducts community planning studies which focus on physical and socio-economic trends and develops plans for Community Development (CD) funding. In addition, it develops and monitors neighborhood strategy area (NSA) plans, and is the lead agency for preparing the Community Development application. The Department is also responsible for reviewing all land use applications submitted to the City Planning Commission under the Uniform Land Use Review Procedure (ULURP).

The Department of General Services (DGS)

The Department of General Services performs basic support functions for City government, including management of City leased property. Within DGS is the Division of Real Property (DRP) which manages surplus City, commercial and industrial properties. DRP is responsible for generating revenue for the City through sale or lease of unoccupied commercial or public space, as well as managing such property until it is sold or leased.

Department of Housing, Preservation and Development (HPD)

The Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD) is responsible for rehabilitation, renovation, and code enforcement in City-owned housing. In addition, it is responsible for management and disposition of in rem housing -- housing which the City has acquired through tax default. To improve existing housing stock, HPD assists organizations and developers in obtaining funds from a variety of federal, state and local programs. HPD is also responsible for demolition of unsafe buildings.

Office of Economic Development (OED)

The Office of Economic Development is responsible for developing and coordinating programs to expand industrial and commercial development in the City. It assists firms in obtaining information and financing for locating in New York City. It also manages major development supported by federal Urban Development Action grants (UDAGs) as well as commercial revitalization programs supported by Community Development funds. In addition to these activities, OED provides information on public incentive and funding programs to firms interested in locating in New York City.

Office of Management and Budget (OMB)

The Mayor's budget arm is the Office of Management and Budget, which develops the City's budget and monitors expenditures and revenues. As part of budget recommendations, it may suggest school closings but cannot authorize them.

The Board of Education

The Board of Education is responsible for its own expenditures within City guidelines. It operates 980 school buildings. In the Board's Division of School Buildings is The Bureau of Facilities Planning, whose goal is maximum utilization of school buildings. It conducts an annual survey to determine specific room usage in each school. The Board has established The Building Review Committee (BRC), charged with developing criteria for evaluating the efficiency and effectiveness of building utilization and making recommendations to the Chancellor or which schools should be closed. The Committee includes members from the Division of School Buildings, Division of Special Education, Division of High Schools, the Office of Community School District affairs, Community School Board

representatives from each borough and representatives of the Community Superintendents. The advisory committee includes members from OMB, the Department of City Planning, Department of General Services, Community Planning Boards, and the labor unions (UFT, CSA, DC-37). It helps to identify potential alternative uses for school buildings.

Community School Boards

The nine elected representatives on each of the 32 Community School Boards allocate the budget for the districts' elementary and junior high schools. Each year the Central Board of Education devises an allocation formula largely based on the number of students attending school in the districts. When enrollment falls, so does the allocation.

The preceding descriptions indicate that responsibilities for the critical tasks of planning for school closings, securing vacant buildings, and linking clients with potential resources are fragmented and uncoordinated. Two agencies -- the Department of City Planning and the Board of Education -- participate in the planning which precedes closing a school. Both agencies are responsible for projecting population trends and distribution of the population which will determine future school enrollment. Because both agencies collect and analyze demographic data, there are often opposing projections of population growth or shifts. Such disagreements can undermine efforts to plan for school closings.

Another problem results from the conflict between OMB and the Board of Education. As we noted earlier, responsibility for balancing the City's budget lies with OMB, but the Board of Education retains decision-making power for the education system. OMB can recommend savings through closing schools; the Board alone can mandate school closings. However, since the Board of Education is responsible for selecting schools to be closed,

planning for reuse cannot begin until it makes the final decision on which schools will be closed.

The lack of coordination among agencies is more acute in the disposition of vacant schools. DRP is charged with marketing surplus property such as schools. However, three other agencies also work with firms and organizations which need property for commercial, residential or community use. HPD coordinates funding for housing developments, City Planning for Community Development, and OED for commercial and industrial use.

This fragmentation of responsibility among city agencies fosters delay in the disposition of vacant schools. Each agency is concerned with achieving its own goals within a specific time frame. Because no single agency is responsible for managing the disposition of surplus school buildings, the lag between closing a school and developing reuse can range from months to years. Moreover, no agency can act until the Board of Education surrenders the building to DRP. As time passes, buildings deteriorate and their marketability decreases. Costs to the City rise: expenditures increase both directly for resealing vacant buildings and indirectly for police and fire services. Revenues which might be obtained from rental or sale of the vacant school are lost, as are tax revenues when the surrounding neighborhood deteriorates. Opportunities for creating jobs through rehabilitation of the building or development of new industries are passed over.

Recommendation 1:

The Division of Real Property (DRP) within the Department of General Services should be given a clear mandate to assume responsibility as the lead agency for marketing surplus school buildings, because of its capability to market City property.

It should be given the authority to coordinate efforts to link clients with school buildings, and to coordinate City agency attempts to develop financing packages for potential clients. DRP shuld make timely and appropriate disposition of vacant schools a high priority.

b) Poor communication between Community Planning Boards and school boards, City agencies and Board of Education results in inadequate planning for school reuse.

The absence of consensus on standards for closing schools creates confusion over which schools should and will be closed and inhibits timely planning for reuse. Because there is conflict in the selection process, energies which might be channeled to developing plans for reuse are spent on defending past decisions and protecting home turf.

The criteria used by OMB to identify schools that could be closed differ from those used by the Board of Education. Consistent with its role, OMB's primary concerns are cost savings. Thus, its criteria focus on those buildings which are most expensive to operate, and unlikely candidates for reuse. The criteria it uses include the following:

— the age of the school and probable useful life after 50 years without modernization.
— building utilization rates lower than 80%;
— enrollments of kindergarten and special education classes;
— neighboring schools within one mile for relocation of students;
— capacity of nearby schools;
— test scores

The Chancellor's office, is concerned with maintaining quality education as well as achieving savings through closing. Thus, test scores are a higher priority for the Board than for OMB: it has adopted a policy that

schools with the highest test scores within a district will not be closed. Moreover, while the Chancellor uses the same utilization formula as OMB, it considers additional factors. The formula is based on a ratio of enrollment to capacity, defined as regular classrooms capable of holding 29 children exclusive of kindergarten, pre-kindergarten and special education. Title I schools are allocated rooms for funded programs depending on enrollment. One of the weaknesses of this formula is that it assumes an average class size of 29 children, and does not reflect actual classroom use in particular schools.

The Building Review Committee bases its recommendation to close a school on a broad range of criteria. In addition to the utilization rate and classroom use which have been determined by the Bureau of Facilities Planning, the Building Review Committee considers:

- the history of enrollment
- availability of convenient space in other school buildings
- type and age of building
- maintenance costs and/or anticipated capital outlays
- ability to maintain racial and ethnic balance
- effect on Board policies concerning integration, zoning, pupil transportation, excessing staff, promotional policies and special education
- buildings scheduled for replacement
- buildings housing primarily adminstrative offices and other than regular classes
- availability of alternate use for the structure
- net savings anticipated from the closing
- availability of other uses within the Board for the building

— programs within the schools

Because there are two sets of criteria for selecting schools for closings, the final decision to close a school is sometimes reached after a prolonged, bitter process. Community School Board plans for closing schools are submitted to the Building Review Committee for approval. However, the CSB has the right to appeal the committee's decision to the Deputy Chancellor, and if its appeal is overruled, to State Commissioner of Education. The appeal process can be lengthy.

Disagreement over criteria for closing schools creates resistance and therefore delay for several reasons. First, it is difficult for local boards to anticipate which schools will be approved by the BRC. Second, Community School Boards may oppose BRC's decision because they do not believe it is appropriate for their district. Third, the district does not perceive any financial benefits in closing schools because all savings accrue to the City. Fourth, CSB's tend to focus on selecting schools to be closed rather than working with community groups to develop possibilities for reuse. Together, these factors result in situations where the building limps along until it is vacant and no use is planned.

The problem created by delay over selection of which schools are to be closed is compounded by the fact that disposition of City property is subject to the Uniform Land Use Review Procedure (ULURP) mandated by the 1975 City Charter revision. The 1975 Charter revisions empowered 59 Community Planning Boards which, among other responsibilities, review and vote upon all proposed land use in their communities. These boards, consisting of no more than 50 members appointed by the Borough President, thus play an important role in determining how a school can be used.

ULURP has several steps. If all deadlines are met, the entire process takes about six months and includes a complex series of procedures which include approval and certification of proposed use by the Community Planning Board, the City Planning Commission, the Board of Estimate, and in cases which involve zoning variances, the Board of Standards and Appeals.

ULURP begins when DRP submits an application for sale or lease of a building to the Department of City Planning. Since the ULURP process cannot technically begin until a school is surrendered to DRP, Community Planning Boards do not necessarily take an active role in planning for the use of a school until it is vacant. Although Community Planning Board members may be aware that school closings are anticipated for their community, they cannot formally evaluate proposed uses until a decision is made by the Community School Board.

Lack of communication between the Community Planning Board and the Community School Board thus may result in critical delay for planning for the building. Communication is complicated by the fact that CPB's may encompass up to four CSB's. Alternately, a CSB often has up to four CPB's within the district. CPB information on land use master plans or needs of community groups which might affect the choice of schools to be closed may not be available to the Community School Board which makes the decision. At the same time, the Community School Board may not inform the Community Planning Board of its decision until after the Chancellor has formally designated the schools to be closed.

The critical nature of this problem has been addressed by the Mayor's Task Force on School Closings created in February 1980. It recommends that six months prior notice be provided to DRP before students are transferred from a school so that ULURP can begin. In addition, to avoid leaving a

building vacant, the Task Force recommends that students should remain in the school until ULURP is complete.

Recommendation 2:

Increased coordination between Community Planning Boards and Community School Boards to plan for use of vacant schools should be developed through assignment of Community School Board members to Community Planning Board Youth Planning, Education and Land Use committees. At the same time, Community Planning Board members should be consulted during the school closing process for their advice and recommendations on options for reuse of buildings proposed for closing.

Recommendation 3:

DRP should require a six months to a year notice before a building is vacated to allow planning for reuse.

c) There is an absence of centralized information for organizations, firms, and community groups on possible uses, funding sources and constraints.

The lack of formal coordination among city agencies responsible for initiating and implementing development in the City makes it difficult to obtain information vital for timely disposition of vacant schools. Technical assistance on possible uses and funding packages is available from three agencies: HPD for housing, OED for industrial or commercial use, and City Planning for development. No single agency can provide adequate information on the varieties of funding for which a developer or organization may be eligible, nor is there a formal mechanism for ensuring that an organization has obtained the information it needs.

Moreover, important information on restrictions of possible use is not available in one central agency. Code restrictions are within the purview of the Building Department; zoning, the City Planning Commission and the

Board of Standards and Appeals. And, although ULURP is described in the City Charter, City publications explaining the process in plain English (or Spanish) are out of print.

The absence of a centralized source of information on land use in the City may be remedied in the near future. To facilitate its marketing of surplus property, the Division of Real Property is preparing a catalogue of 70 buildings in its inventory. The catalogue, which will be distributed to 20,000 organizations or firms throughout the world, includes photographs and specifications of 20 schools as well as descriptions of ULURP and available funding packages.

Recommendation 4:

DRP's role as real estate manager should be expanded to include broader technical assistance to "clients" that demonstrate ability to provide successful reuse. Such assistance should routinely include advice in the ULURP process, relevant funding sources and referral to appropriate City agencies.

Recommendation 5:

In addition to its catalogue, DRP should develop handbooks explaining ULURP, regulations and requirements for alternate use, and possible funding sources should be developed and distributed to potential users. These books should be available in English and Spanish.

Chapter IV: Ineffective Strategies for Protecting Empty Schools Prior to Reuse.

Existing strategies for protecting vacant school buildings are ineffective for three reasons: responsibility for securing vacant buildings is unclear; short term measures do not work; there is insufficient funding to seal and protect buildings.

a. Responsibility for securing and maintenance of school buildings is unclear.

Responsibility for securing and maintaining surplus school buildings is divided between the Board of Education and DRP. Until DRP receives the keys to a surrendered building, it will not initiate guard service or sealing. As our case studies show, the time lag between closing a school and securing it is a critical factor in achieving an alternate use for the building. Vacant buildings can be vandalized overnight and damaged almost beyond repair in a week.

Since the Board of Education provides janitorial service rather than guards, it is important for the surrender of the building to take place as soon as the school has been closed. The potential use of a school diminishes as damage increases. Thus, it is important for the Board to pass the responsibility for maintaining the vacant school building to DRP as soon as the building is vacated.

Recommendation 6:

The Board of Education should transfer buildings to DRP as soon as they are vacant. The Board of Education should remove all supplies and equipment when the building is vacated. The building should be "broom clean" when it is transferred to DRP.

b. Existing short term security measures are ineffective

The extent to which DRP maintains or secures a building depends on the condition of the building when it is surrendered to DRP. If the building is in good condition, DRP will provide guard service and fencing until a contract is awarded for seal-up. The Comptroller sets the price for guard service which averaged $5 an hour in 1979.

Buildings in good condition for which a city agency or private developer have expressed on interest are generally accorded priority for sealing with either tin, cinder block or two-by-fours and plywood. Less desirable buildings, or those which have suffered minor damage are sealed if funding is available. Since DRP's responsibility is primarily custodial, it merely provides essential services to the building and does not undertake major repairs. Thus, if major damage occurs before the building is sealed, DRP cannot justify extensive work to restore it.

DRP manages an extensive portfolio of buildings including hospitals and major public structures as well as schools. Since there is priority ranking for surplus buildings, many buildings low on the list remain open and unprotected for several months. Because full-time guard service is expensive, DRP supplied partial coverage and relies on routine police patrols for protection. Thus, buildings become victims of vandalism and arson. Costs to the City rise because of the need for resealing and probable demolition.

c. Funding to protect vacant buildings is inadequate

In 1979, DRP received $100,000 each for guard service and fencing, and $400,000 for sealup from Community Development monies. At an average cost of $40,000 for sealup, the City could seal approximately 100 of the 2,000 buildings in its real estate portfolio in 1979. Because the capital budget

does not include money for sealing, nine of every ten buildings must be protected with guard service or fencing. However, at $5 an hour, the City can only afford to provide two men, twenty four hour coverage for two buildings a year.

Once a building has deteriorated beyond repair, it can be demolished at a cost of $100,000. Demolition is the option of last resort, however. More funding is needed to insure that such buildings, especially schools which once played a vital role in the city, do not become abandoned relics, ultimately destined for demolition.

Recommendation 7:

Adequate funding for watchmen service, and sealup to ensure that the building retains potential for use with minimal costs for repairs should be provided to DRP. Additional funding should be supplied from Community Development monies. The City Planning Commission should recommend that monies for sealup and demolition be included in the capital budget.

Recommendation 8:

Buildings declared unsafe should be demolished.

Chapter V: Absence of Strategic and Long-term Planning For Marketing Surplus Supplies

Our case studies illustrate a variety of uses for public schools. Within the past year, DRP has succeeded in selling or leasing schools for artists space, housing, and vocational training center. Other communities have used vacant schools as museums, housing and community centers. Moreover, as EFL's recent study, Surplus Schools - School Space in New York City, details, there are options for using underutilized school space to avoid closing schools when enrollment declines. These include the multi-use program which involves rental of surplus school space to not-for-profit organizations, and the extended use program which encourages rental of space to local community groups after school hours.

These diverse approaches for using surplus school space indicate that abandonment and decay of vacant school buildings need not be the inevitable consequence of declining enrollment. However, finding alternate uses for surplus space within existing schools requires rational planning by both community groups and city agencies.

Such planning must involve consideration of costs and benefits of existing options. For example, underutilized school space could be used for Board of Education programs such as special education programs, Community School Board offices, or to replace existing leased space. Other City agencies such as the Human Resources Administration could use the surplus space for their programs and services. Multi-use of school buildings could provide needed space for Community Planning Board offices, local development corporations or community groups. Schools can be rented or sold to private developers, not-for-profit agencies, either singly or as a consortium.

However, there are some serious obstacles to implementing these options. As the EFL report discusses in detail, multi-use has not been used extensively because the City's rental fees for school space are often out of reach of community groups, and profit-making organizations are prohibited from renting school space by the State Education Law. Moreover, the fact that community groups must schedule their programs to coincide witht the Board of Education's calendar creates disruption in service delivery. At the same time, community school boards are very selective about the potential use of surplus space. Resistance against certain types of programs such as those involving delinquents runs high; CSB's have even opposed Board of Education use of drop-out programs.

Other difficulties arise in consideration of lease versus sale of a vacant school. Community groups often cannot afford to rent or buy a vacant school, although they may need the space and can offer benefits to the neighborhood. In contrast, private developers who may be able to pay the rent or purchase the building, may not want to locate in neighborhoods where buildings are vacant. Moreover, their proposed use may conflict with the community's goals for the building.

The City's need for revenue also represents a significant factor in disposing of surplus schools. It must decide between one-shot revenues from sale, or annual revenue from rental.

It also has a legitimate concern with the viability of the organizations which express their interest in the building — their financial stability as well as their growth prospects.

It is apparent that developing uses for excess school space or surplus school buildings involves a complex decision-making process. Each option

must be evaluated in terms of community land use plans and the needs of community groups as well as financial gains or losses to the City. Although several of the uses cited have been developed, success has been achieved on a case by case basis rather than as part of a coherent process. To resolve the problems of increasing surplus space, the City must develop rational plans for closing schools and marketing surplus buildings.

Recommendation 9:

DRP should develop criteria for reuse based on costs to the City as well as appropriate use of the building within the community. DRP should consider the criteria proposed by the City Council President in her memo to the Board of Estimate suggesting changes in current city procedures for reuse of vacant institutional buildings. Among others, these criteria include evaluation of one shot revenue, annual revenue, impact of proposed use on the community, and viabilty of the client. (President of the Council, City of New York, "Memo to Members of the Board of Estimate," April 18, 1980).

Recommendation 10:

Existing constraints inhibiting reuse such as building codes, zoning restrictions, and state laws prohibiting multi-use by profit-making organizations should be examined and reformed where necessary.

Recommendation 11:

The disposition process for vacant public buildings shuld be tightened and strengthened by establishing these suggested criteria, enforcing timetables and developing specific strategies such as using requests for proposals (RFPs) for marketing surplus schools.

Conclusion

The combination of declining enrollments and fiscal constraints probably means that the process of closing schools will continue to be viewed as a means to achieve more efficient school operations. However, if this processd is not well-planned and coordinated, and does not provide for alternative use of the empty building, its effects on neighborhoods can be devastating. In fact, in the long run, neglecting to make adequate provision for the building probably will be more costly to the City. Attempting to close 40 schools in six months, as the Mayor has proposed, is a sure course to neighborhood decay. The results of such ill-planned efforts in the past that have caused the announcement of a school closing to arouse so much trepidation in the hearts of community residents.

The barriers to productive use of vacant schools lie in city and Board of Education procedures to close schools and dispose of the buildings. Developing a mechanism for communication and coordination between the Board of Education, Community School Boards, Community Planning Boards and city agencies ought to precede any further attempt to close schools. Only then can the pursuit of alternate uses and their timely occupation of schools buildings proceed. And only then can we hope to break the link between closed schools and neighborhoods.

ELEMENTARY, MIDDLE AND JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOLS CLOSED BY BOROUGH, 1975-1979

	# Schools Closed	% of Total Schools Closed	# of Schools	# of Total Schools
Manhattan	17	33	125	15
Bronx	12	22	169	21
Brooklyn	17	33	275	34
Staten Island	2	3	48	6
Queens	5	9	196	24
	53	100 %	813	100 %

SCHOOLS CLOSED BY DISTRICT BY BOROUGH, 1975-1980

Manhattan		Brooklyn		Queens	
CSD # 1	4	CSD # 13	2	CSD # 24	1
CSD # 2	2	CSD # 14	2	CSD # 25	1
CSD # 4	3	CSD # 15	1	CSD # 26	1
CSD # 5	7	CSD # 16	2	CSD # 28	2
CSD # 6	1	CSD # 19	2		5
	17	CSD # 20	1		
		CSD # 21	1	Staten Island	
Bronx		CSD # 22	1		
		CSD # 23	3	CSD # 31	2
CSD # 7	4	CSD # 32	2		2
CSD # 8	2		17		
CSD # 11	2				
CSD # 12	4				
	12				

Source: Unpublished data, Office of the City Council President, 1980.

SCHOOL USE BY BOROUGH, FEBRUARY, 1979

	Vacant	Rental	Other	Total
Manhattan	8	9	-	17
Bronx	5	3	4	12
Brooklyn	7	3	6	16*
Queens	1	-	4	5
Richmond	1	-	1	2
	22	15	15	52

* Information for one school missing.

SCHOOL USE BY AGE

	New	Middle Aged	Old	Total
Vacant	1	2	19	22
Rental	-	-	15	15
Sold or Demolished	1	2	12	15
	2	4	46	52

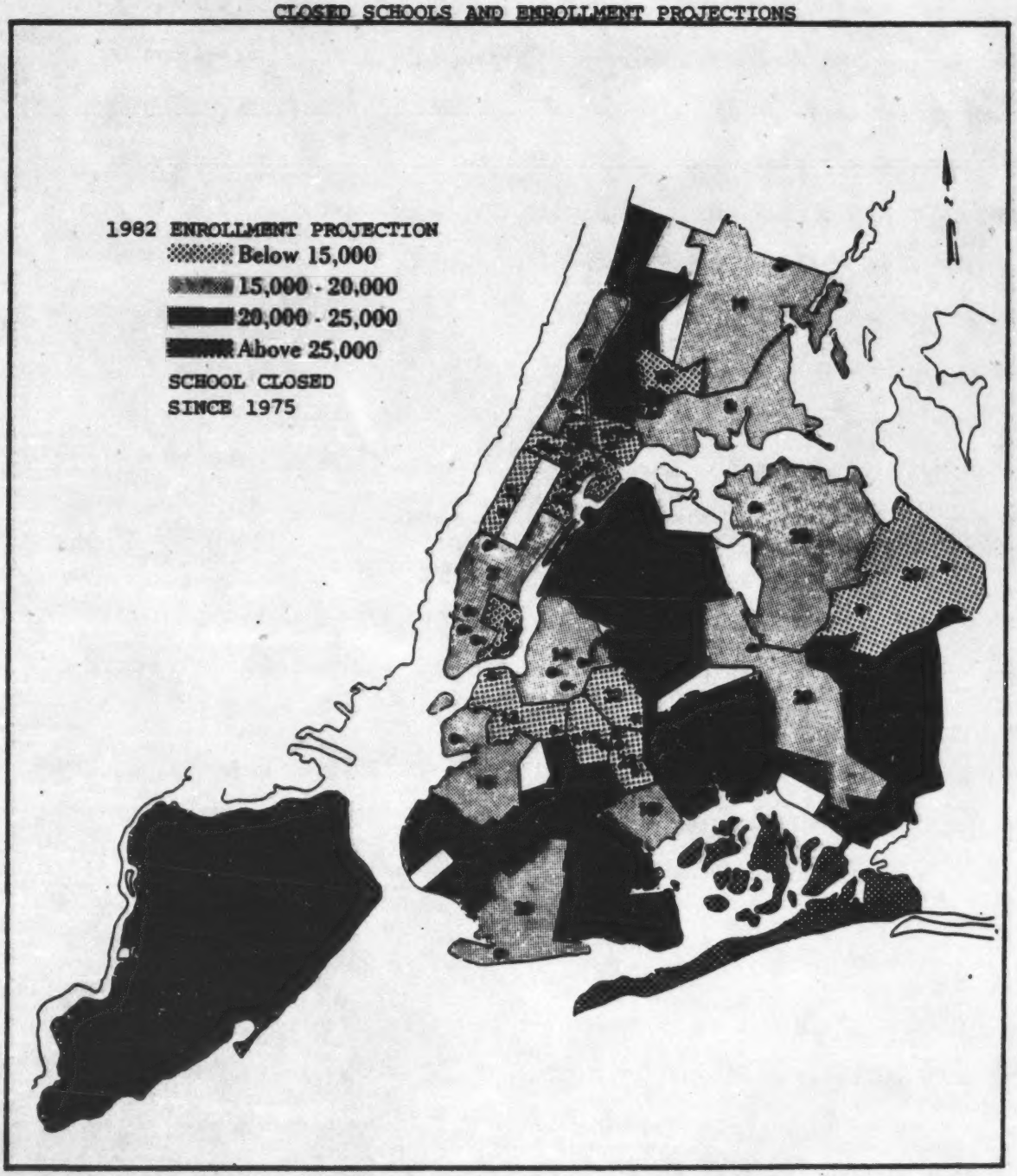
New: 1961 - present
Middle-aged: beween 1931 - 1960
Old: before 1930

Source: Unpublished data, the Office of the City Council President, 1980.

PERCENT OF SCHOOLS CLOSED BY AGE

	All Schools	Closed Schools	% Closed
Old	439	46	10 %
Middle-aged	299	4	1
New	254	2	1
Total	992	52	5 %

CLOSED SCHOOLS AND ENROLLMENT PROJECTIONS



SOURCE: CAPITAL NEEDS AND PRIORITIES FOR THE CITY OF NEW YORK, CITY PLANNING COMMISSION, 1979.

Appendix I: Methodology for Real Estate and Crime Data

REAL ESTATE DATA: METHODOLOGY

Information on real estate status and trends was derived from a computerized data file system designed and maintained by Management Information/Services, N.Y.C. Dept. of Planning. Two packaged reports were used to generate information concerning status of vacant buildings and trends in tax arrears.

Numbered tax blocks were used to define a small area surrounding each school. This area generally corresponds to the attendance or "feeder" zone for the school. Areas ranged in size from 9 to 15 tax blocks for each school area. Data was collected by tax block and also summed for the predefined set of blocks surrounding the school.

The time span for each data set included years between 1975 and 1978 inclusively. The report on Tax arrearage contained data only for 1974, 1976 and 1978. The report on vacant building status had all years.

The report of Tax arrearage showed the number of buildings in tax arrears per year, per tax block and for the total area. In addition, the data was broken out into those buildings 3-5 quarters in arrears, 6-12 and 12 and over.

The report on the status of vacant buildings itemized each vacant building in the defined area according to the circumstances of vacancy, i.e. vacant demolished, vacant above ground, vacant new structure. The report also specifies reoccupied buildings.

Caveats

Trends appear in the Tax Arrerage data are complicated by the initiation and implementation of a new city rule stating that buildings in arrears for more than five quarters can be taken over the by city. Previously the

limit was 12 quarters. The new rule has had considerable impact which varies by area depending on whether or not the buildings are worth keeping. Due to this distorting effect, a sum for all buildings in tax arrears was used rather than a break out by number of quarters in arrears.

An additional caveat to the tax arrear reports in that the report does not distinguish between building owners grossly in tax arrears and those with minimal unpaid bills.

For several of the school areas, the percent increase in tax arrears over time was considerably lower than the borough wide total. In these cases, it is important to look at the percent increase in demolished and vacant buildings over time compared to the percent increase for the borough as a whole. A higher number of demolished buildings could contribute to the lower number of buildings in tax arrears due to the elimination of buildings in tax arrears.

Both computer reports -- tax arrears and vacant building status, suffered from a certain amount of missings data, i.e. the computer could not access information on specific tax blocks. In cases where the percent of missing data is significant, conclusions are discounted accordingly.

Crime Data Methodology

Although the closing of a school cannot be said to cause long term increases in crime in an area, the existence of a vacant building can easily contribute to existing crime and harrassment. Indicators of such a contribution to crime might include 2 factors: crime for the area surrounding the school and crime within the school building itself.

Collecting longitudinal data on crime in small local areas is particularly difficult for several reasons. Consistent and accurate longitudinal data is available only at the precinct level which is too large an area to

be useful in local analysis. Some precincts have begun to keep crime statistics by sector but this method is too recent to apply to trends starting in 1974.

In terms of crime within the school building, there is a tendency to downplay crimes and vandalism occurring in vacant buildings. Crimes occurring in vacant buildings are reported less frequently. A certain crime may be considered less of an offense than the same act committed in an occupied building. In addition, the school board, Division of Maintenance and operations does not keep a record on vandalism in schools once the school is closed.

Data was collected by visiting each precinct office and discussing with several officers the records they might have and their impressions of the area immediately surrounding the school with respect to current types of crime, changes in crime since 1974, and the level of crime in the area in comparison with the rest of the precinct.